

§ 3400.11 Composition of peer review groups.

(a) Peer review group members will be selected based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific or technical fields, taking into account the following factors:

- (1) The level of formal scientific or technical education by the individual;
- (2) The extent to which the individual has engaged in relevant research, the capacities in which the individual has done so (e.g., principal investigator, assistant), and the quality of such research;
- (3) Professional recognition as reflected by awards and other honors received from scientific and professional organizations outside of the Department;
- (4) The need of the group to include within its membership experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific or technical fields;
- (5) The need of the group to include within its membership experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., universities, industry, private consultant(s)) and geographic locations; and
- (6) The need of the group to maintain a balanced membership, e.g., minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.

§ 3400.12 Conflicts of interest.

Members of peer review groups covered by this part are subject to relevant provisions contained in Title 18 of the United States Code relating to criminal activity, Department regulations governing employee responsibilities and conduct (part O of this title), and Executive Order 11222, as amended.

§ 3400.13 Availability of information.

Information regarding the peer review process will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552), the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a), and implementing Departmental regulations (part 1 of this title).

§ 3400.14 Proposal review.

(a) All research grant applications will be acknowledged. Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made for responsiveness to the request for proposals (e.g., relation-

ship of application to research program area). Proposals which do not fall within the guidelines as stated in the annual request for proposals will be eliminated from competition and will be returned to the applicant. Proposals whose budgets exceed the maximum allowable amount for a particular program area as announced in the request for proposals may be considered as lying outside the guidelines.

(b) All applications will be carefully reviewed by the Administrator, qualified officers or employees of the Department, the respective peer review group, and *ad hoc* reviewers, as required. Written comments will be solicited from *ad hoc* reviewers when required, and individual written comments and in-depth discussions will be provided by peer review group members prior to recommending applications for funding. Applications will be ranked and support levels recommended within the limitation of total available funding for each research program area as announced in the applicable request for proposals.

(c) No awarding official will make a research project grant based upon an application covered by this part unless the application has been reviewed by a peer review group and/or *ad hoc* reviewers in accordance with the provisions of this part and said reviewers have made recommendations concerning the scientific merit of such application.

(d) Except to the extent otherwise provided by law, such recommendations are advisory only and are not binding on program officers or on the awarding official.

§ 3400.15 Review criteria.

(a) Subject to the varying conditions and needs of States, Federal funded agricultural research supported under these provisions shall be designed to, among other things, accomplish one or more of the following purposes:

- (1) Continue to satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- (2) Enhance the long-term viability and competitiveness of the food production and agricultural system of the United States within the global economy;
- (3) Expand economic opportunities in rural America and enhance the quality